

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003103

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/WE, DRL/IL, EUR/ERA, EUR/PPD, INR/EUC AND
EB
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB
DEPT OF COMMERCE FOR ITA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [EU](#) [FR](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#)

SUBJECT: FRANCE'S MAY 29 REFERENDUM ON EU CONSTITUTION:
"THE QUESTION OF TURKEY"

REF: A. (A) PARIS 2942
[1](#)B. (B) PARIS 2663

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) "The question of Turkey" as the French refer to it, looms large in the background of voter concerns as France's electorate prepares for the May 29 national referendum on a proposed constitution for the European Union. Opponents of the constitutional treaty suggest that it will make Turkey's membership in the EU more likely, leading to a new influx of Muslim immigrants seeking work. France's already large Muslim minority, mostly of North African origin, is not well integrated into French society. Among those susceptible to nativist and xenophobic fears, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim prejudice runs high, and transfers easily to opposing Europe, the constitution and enlargement to include Turkey. In addition, President Chirac's championing of opening accession talks with Turkey tempts some who oppose Turkey's membership in the EU to "vote against Chirac" in the referendum. For many, the prospect of an EU that includes Turkey also confirms their fear that European enlargement is "a runaway train." With Turkey in the club, the "European idea" would logically also be open to Russia and many countries around the Mediterranean, ensuring that the EU remains a vast free-trade zone and does not become a closer, political union. END SUMMARY.

LOOMING IN THE BACKGROUND

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the early weeks of the referendum campaign (which began on March 4 when President Chirac announced the May 29 date) the "question of Turkey" was at the forefront of French voters' concerns. Through mid-April most polls showed that opposition to Turkey's membership in the EU was the leading motivator of those who said that they planned to vote 'no' on May 29. Since then, as the debate over the proposed constitution has centered, nearly exclusively, on two issues -- the constitution's compatibility with the French social model (reftel A) and the weakening of France should French voters reject the proposed charter -- fears linked to Turkey have somewhat receded into the background for most voters. So much so that President Chirac, in a fifty-minute prime-time television appearance on May 3, did not see fit to bring up Turkey at all. Notwithstanding the current eclipse of Turkey as a watershed issue in the referendum debate, pollsters are also finding that it continues to loom very large in the background of voter concerns as a "crystallizer" or "refractor" of differences among the French with regard to two key sets of issues: one social, highlighting differences over the role of immigration, multiculturalism and religion in the future evolution of French society and the other European, highlighting differences among the French over what the EU should become.

REFRACTING DIFFERENCES OVER SOCIAL ISSUES

[1](#)3. (SBU) For many in France, and not only among those susceptible to the extremist right's virulent xenophobia and nativism, Turkey's prospective membership in the EU conjures up fears of unlimited Muslim immigration. French society has largely failed to integrate the estimated five million Muslims already in France. The specter of another wave of Muslim immigrants -- of their "taking away jobs and undercutting wages," of exacerbated urban tensions, and of conflict stemming from the religious fundamentalism of a few of these immigrants and the French Republic's rigid commitment to secularism -- has been demagogically exploited by opponents of the proposed constitution, in particular on the far-right. However, many who support the proposed constitution (including France's most popular politician, Nicolas Sarkozy, president of Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party) are also against Turkey's accession to the EU. In part, this opposition to Turkey stems from recognition of the difficulties French society is having adjusting to multiculturalism and other factors for social change stemming from globalization. For Sarkozy and other "opponents of Turkey," who are not bigots, the effects in France of

including more than 70 million Turks in the EU is a bridge too far for French society's capacity to adapt.

AND OVER DIFFERENT VISIONS FOR EUROPE

14. (SBU) The focus of the referendum debate on whether or not the proposed constitution supports or undermines the French social model has masked deep differences in France over the right direction for the European construction -- what the proposed constitution should lead to. Different positions on "the question of Turkey," reflect different visions for Europe. Many who would have objected to enlargement to 25, but had no opportunity to express their views due to the EU's "democracy deficit," plan to vote 'no' to object both to enlargement to 25 and to prospective enlargement to include Turkey. A Europe that includes Turkey may also be open to Russia and to many countries around the Mediterranean. Such an "ever-expanding Europe without a border" is also a pre-imminently "liberal" economic association, too diverse and unwieldy to muster much political clout. Pollsters believe that a significant portion of French supporters of the proposed constitution oppose Turkey's inclusion in the EU for precisely this reason -- that including Turkey insures that the EU remains no more than a vast free-trade zone, and does not become a stronger political union. Defending himself against the charge that he is a lukewarm Europeanist, President Chirac in his television appearance May 3 called for a "Europe that conjoins single market and social harmonization, that does not subsume the identity of Europe's peoples and nations and in which European authorities do what only they can do better than national ones." President Chirac, the leading proponent in France of having the EU open accession talks with Turkey, believes that inclusion of Turkey is compatible with this vision of a union of nations that share democratic political values and a framework for concerted action. This is one of the defining differences between Chirac and his principal rival for leadership of the center-right, Sarkozy. Those who stress that civilizational affinities unite Europeans and, in some instances, also support a federated Europe (for example, Francois Bayrou head of the centrist Union for French Democracy (UDF) party), are adamantly hostile to any possibility of including Turkey in Europe.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) With only three weeks left to go before the May 29 referendum, is it unlikely that the "question of Turkey," despite the demagoguery of right-wing vote-'no' advocates, will take center stage in the debate over the proposed constitution. However, because differing positions on Turkey's place in the EU reflect differences over future challenges to French society and differences over the future evolution of the EU, Turkey is likely to be a high-profile issue after the referendum -- as the October 3 date for the start of accession negotiations approaches and leads to the long season of jockeying for favor with the electorate in the run-up to the 2007 presidential campaign. END COMMENT.

ROSENBLATT